



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

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What is Energy Insecurity?

By Allison Udris M.S. LCPC

Energy insecurity is the inability to meet basic household energy needs such as cooking, lighting, heating, and cooling. Many people struggle to afford their energy bills, resulting in negative consequences such as shut-offs, service interruptions, and being exposed to extreme cold or heat. According to Dr. Diana Hernandez from Columbia University, the elderly and households at or below the federal poverty line are more heavily burdened by energy insecurity.

Some people depend on electricity for their health

How Could Energy Insecurity Affect My Health?

Many health conditions are worsened by the environment. Many people need to refrigerate medications such as unopened vials of insulin. People with respiratory conditions may use oxygen, and rely on electricity to power their supply. Many people use medical devices that run on electricity, such as breathing machines, power wheelchairs, home dialysis equipment, and sleep apnea monitors. Power outages or utility shut offs could potentially be life-threatening. Additionally, energy insecurity affects mental health. When people frequently worry about fuel bills and home conditions, they are at a higher risk for conditions such as chronic stress, anxiety, and depression.

Energy Assistance Programs

Various programs exist to help individuals afford their utility bills. The Maryland Department of Health and Human Services has an Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). You can apply for energy assistance with OHEP, which is a year-round program. Some programs offer grants to assist you with energy bills, others use "budget billing" to spread your annual utility bill into even monthly bills to avoid spikes in payments, and others

offer installation of energy-saving materials to lower your household's energy use and lower monthly utility bills.

There are resources available to help pay utility bills

OHEP's programs include:

- Electric Grants – Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP)
- Heating Grants – Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP)
- Prevent Shut-Off with Regular Payments – Universal Service Protection Program (USPP)
- Past-Due Electric Bills – Arrearage Retirement Assistance (ARA)
- Past-Due Gas Bills – Gas Arrearage Retirement Assistance (GARA)
- Energy Efficiency for Your Home – DHCD Energy Efficiency Programs, EmPOWER Maryland Low-Income Energy Efficiency Program, Weatherization Assistance Program

You can learn more about each program and specific eligibility requirements by visiting OHEP's webpage at <http://dhr.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/>, by calling 1-800-332-6347, or by emailing OHEP@baltimorecity.gov.

In order to apply to the program, you will need photo ID, proof of Maryland residency, copies of social security cards for all household members, proof of income, and copies of your most recent utility and fuel bills. You can apply online, by phone, in-person at your local energy assistance office, or by mailing in a printed application (you can call your local office to have them send you an application in the mail if you do not have access

CONTENTS

What is Energy Insecurity?	1
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to a computer or printer). The local energy assistance offices in Baltimore City are through the Baltimore City Community Action Partnership (CAP).

Eastern Cap Center
1731 E. Chase Street, 21213
410-545-0136

Northern Cap Center
5225 York Road, 21212
410-396-6084

Northwest Cap Center
3939 Reisterstown Road, 21215
443-984-1384

Southern Cap Center
606 Cherry Hill Road, 21225
410-545-0900

Southeast Cap Center
3411 Bank Street, 21224
410-545-6518

Secondly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) offers the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This federally-funded grant program assists low-income families that pay a large portion of the household income on home energy.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

According to DHHS, about 20% of qualified households will receive LIHEAP benefits, which are no longer given out once LIHEAP funds have run out for the year. To learn more about this program, call (202) 401-9351 or visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/liheap>.

Finally, if Baltimore Gas & Electric (BGE) is your provider, they offer several programs that may offset the cost of your bill. The PeakRewards Electric Water Heater Program and PeakRewards Air Conditioning Program allow you to earn bill credits. Additionally, the BGE Smart Energy Savers Program offers discounts and re-

Baltimore Gas & Electric assistance programs

bates to cut energy costs. Examples of these programs include appliance rebates and recycling, home energy checkups, and energy savings days. To learn more about programs offered through BGE, call 410-265-4000 or 1-800-786-2000, or visit <https://bgesmartenergy.com/residential>.

Special needs programs for older people

BGE also has Special Needs Programs for the elderly, those with disabilities, or those on life support. If you have medical equipment that is powered by electricity, BGE provides special outage planning information. You can receive this information by calling 1-800-685-0123. Additionally, BGE customers with serious illnesses can ask their physician to submit forms on their behalf, informing BGE of your specific medical and energy needs. Finally, if you are hospitalized and unable to pay your BGE bill, you can ask to speak to a hospital social worker. The social worker can call BGE's Hospital Program to delay payment until you have returned home from your hospital stay. You can learn more about these BGE's Special Needs Programs by calling 1-800-735-2258 or visiting <https://www.bge.com/MyAccount/CustomerSupport/Pages/SpecialNeedsProgram.aspx>. BGE takes extra steps to avoid service delay or termination for Special Needs Program members.



Energy Efficiency Tips

Energy efficient homes tend to have lower energy bills because less energy is wasted. Here are some tips on becoming more energy efficient at home:

- Turn off lights when not in use, and switch to energy efficient lightbulbs such as LEDs if possible
- Unplug electronics when not in use
- Close your blinds or curtains to keep your home cool during warmer months, or open your blinds and curtains to add heat to your home during colder months (sunlight passing through windows can raise the temperature inside your home)
- Make sure your home is properly insulated to maintain indoor temperatures
- Replace your air filters regularly (dirty filters make heating and cooling systems work harder)
- Use appliances such as washers, dryers, and dishwashers at night to avoid overuse of your power grid during peak daytime usage hours

- When preparing small meals, use smaller appliances such as toaster ovens or the microwave rather than your large stove or oven (smaller appliances generate less heat)
- Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes
- Wash clothes in cold water, air dry clothes when possible, and clean the lint filter in your dryer between each use
- Visit www.energysaver.gov for videos on how to complete DIY weatherization and energy efficiency home improvement projects



Preparing for a Power Outage

Sometimes power outages are unavoidable, even if you have been making bill payments. It is important to make an emergency power outage plan so that you can protect your health during a power outage.

Here are some tips to help you plan for a power outage:

- Ask your doctor to notify your energy provider in advance that you depend on medical equipment that is powered by electricity.
- Keep your electronics, such as your cell phone, fully charged. If you drive, make sure your car has a full tank of gas.
- Keep batteries and flashlights on hand. Consider purchasing backup energy sources, such as a rechargeable battery or power bank. These sources can keep your phone charged in case you need to call someone for help.
- Keep your refrigerator and freezer closed to avoid food spoilage. Unopened refrigerators can keep food cold for up to 4 hours during a power outage; unopened full freezers can keep cold for up to 48 hours.
- Keep water bottles, non-perishable food items, a blanket, prescriptions, and a first aid kit on hand.
- Create a list of emergency contacts, such as friends, family, and your doctor. Make sure you include their name, phone number, and address. Additionally, create a list of your medications. This information can be especially helpful for emergency personnel and first responders, if you need their assistance.

Resources and References

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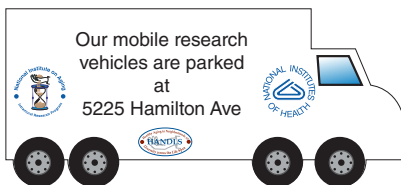
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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the affects of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. We want to do this for people from all backgrounds, particularly those in poor and minority communities.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.